

The central spiritual foundation in the earthly and human life of Jesus was undoubtedly his relationship with and dependence upon the Spirit of God. It was from this dependent relationship that everything else sprang. It was the Spirit of God who brought him into relationship with the Father and gave him his knowledge of the Father and his will. It was the Spirit who gave him his ability to carry out the will of the Father and enabled him to reveal the Father to his disciples. The Spirit of God impinged on Jesus in every way, making genuine spiritual life possible. Similarly for us the Spirit has to be the pre-eminent foundation for our spirituality. This work of the Spirit in Jesus can be conveniently looked at under two heads - Jesus born of the Spirit and Jesus anointed of the Spirit.

### **Jesus - born of the Spirit**

The humanity of Jesus, the incarnation, was the work of the Holy Spirit. This is abundantly clear from the angel's words to Mary, in which he clarified how Jesus would be conceived; "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*" (Lk. 1:35). These words were confirmed later to Joseph when the angel, speaking about Mary's pregnancy, said to him that "*that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 1:20). Thus the Spirit operated on the humanity of Mary to bring about the birth of a human child. Jesus was born of the Spirit from Mary's flesh; he was genuinely Mary's child, flesh of her flesh. The Spirit did not simply make use of Mary's womb for a totally new creation of flesh. Paul affirmed this when he wrote of the origin of the Son, "*as to his human nature (he) was a descendant of David*" (Rom 1:3). He was truly a descendant of David, not an intruder into the physical line.

There is, of course, much more to the idea of a conception of a child than the creation of a physical body. The conception of a person is something of which the body is only one part. Along with the body there also grows a mind, feelings, a unique identity, a will, a soul, a spirit. These other parts also have their origin at the moment of "conception", and together make up the human person. If we are to see Jesus as fully human, therefore, we have to allow in the human nature of Jesus all these other things that make up the totality of our humanity. This means that when we talk of the conception of Jesus by the Spirit of God we are talking not simply about the creation of a physical human body but about the spirit, the mind and all the other features that go to make us human beings.

In the normal process of human conception all these different attributes, though retaining something of their original beauty and wonder, are marred or tainted. The central problem of that fallen nature is that the spirit in particular has lost its full contact with God through sin; the human being starts off with spiritual blindness. The consequence of this is that all the other features are impaired; the will is rebellious, the mind is wrongly directed, the emotions lack self control etc, and destructive behaviour follows. This, however, did not happen in Jesus. If such spiritual blindness was latent in Mary, as undoubtedly it was, it was not passed on to Jesus; he was described by the angel as that "*holy one*" (Lk. 1:35). The can only mean that the humanity that came from Mary to form the human origins of Jesus must have been purified and regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit. Put another way, the eternal Son of God, in taking on human flesh through the working of the Spirit, could not but regenerate that flesh. Thus whilst it remains true that the human flesh of Jesus bore the mark of our humanity and was therefore

**In receiving Jesus we receive an operation of the Holy Spirit on our own humanity**

subject to all the temptations and natural limitations of our humanity, it is equally true that because it had been given its life by the Spirit it became regenerated humanity and therefore able to receive from God and respond to God in a full unimpeded flow. "*The humanity that he takes is the old humanity of Adam ..... now taken from Mary and given a capacity and an ability that are not native to it. It is the capacity and ability to be so united with God that it becomes the means of his (God's) self-expression and self giving to the world*" (T. Small, Giving Gift)

It was this sanctification of the humanity of Jesus by the Spirit that made all the difference. It meant that Jesus grew up as a fully human person but with a spirit that was fully open to the reality of God and to his ways. It was a humanity that was aware of and in contact with God because it had been born of the Spirit. The growth and development of that intense awareness of God was due to a continued intimate fellowship with the same Holy Spirit that had brought about his birth. This was the foundation of his early years of childhood and manhood - a regenerated humanity in touch with his Father through the Spirit and a humanity constantly fed by the presence of the Spirit.

What does this have to teach us about our own spiritual foundations? The answer is simply that our own human nature (our spirit in particular) must have the same touch of the Holy Spirit on it if we are to have a full flow of spiritual fellowship and knowledge of God. This is precisely what Jesus spoke of in his conversation with Nicodemus. He drew Nicodemus' attention to the need for a "new birth" for any human person who wants to see or enter the kingdom of God, and this new birth he describes as being "*born again of the Spirit*" (Jn 3:3-8). In other words, Jesus was saying that something has to happen to our human nature if we are to begin a life of true spiritual understanding and awareness - it has to be born of the Spirit. More precisely our human spirit has to have restored to it the ability to be in tune with God and aware of Him. He was pointing to the fact that something of what had happened in his own conception has now to happen in our human lives. The same point is underlined by a statement that John makes in the prologue to his gospel. There he describes those who receive Jesus and believe in his name as being given the right to become children of God, saying that they are children "*born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God*" (Jn 1:13).

### **Further consequences of being born of the Spirit**

A very important aspect of the spiritually unclouded humanity of Jesus was that he was able to perceive through the Spirit his true nature as a person and his standing with God. As he grew, he developed an awareness that God was his Father in a very profound way, that he and his Father were "one" in divine nature, that he was the "only begotten and unique son". This awareness was the work of the Spirit. Thus, though in every way human, he became aware at the same time of his divinity.

The first intimation that we have of such a realisation was his remark to his parents in the Temple when he was in his early 'teens, "... I must be about my Father's business" (Lk. 2:49). Later on, in the midst of his ministry, the full force of that consciousness broke out in the words, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (Jn 8:58). The Spirit, in other words, enabled him to realise who he was in relation to God. It is very important for us to know that the Spirit seeks to do exactly the same for us. He does not, of course, reveal to us that we are divine, but he certainly reveals us that we are his sons and daughters. As Paul says, "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are sons of God" and so we cry, "Abba, Father". There is no greater spiritual foundation than our awareness of our standing as children of God, for it is at that point that we also become aware of being loved with an everlasting love. We have really found ourselves, our foundation is secure.

Another characteristic of Jesus' spiritual nature was the inner imperative or compulsion from the Spirit to make God's concerns his central interest. This comes out very clearly in the remark already quoted from his youth, "I must be about my Father's business". Two further important aspects of the Spirit's work in him were the impulsion to study the scriptures and to engage in conversation with his Father (prayer), aspects to be considered in more detail in separate chapters. These are all crucial aspects of the life we are led into when, like Jesus, we become born of the Spirit. Without that new birth nothing of real consequence can be built. That is why the Spirit is the central spiritual foundation of our life. Without Him and his work we remain unrelated to God.

#### **Anointed with the Spirit.**

All four gospels make mention of the fact that the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus after his baptism. All speak of the Spirit coming upon him as a dove, and John notes that it remained on him. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record a voice from heaven re-iterating the truth of which Jesus had become deeply conscious, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" and John the Baptist bears this out in John's gospel (Jn 1:34). This episode introduces us, therefore, to a further working of the Spirit in the life of Jesus, and one of tremendous importance for his human mission.

Two words in particular are associated with this coming of the Spirit on Jesus after his baptism and help us to understand it. The first is the word "anointed". This is a word Jesus himself used in connection with this episode. In Luke's gospel we are told that Jesus himself, preaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, used as his text verses from Isaiah 61 in which came the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to preach....." (Lk 4:16ff). Luke transposes this preaching event at Capernaum and puts it at the start of the ministry of Jesus simply in order to make the point that for Jesus the event at the Jordan was a fulfilment of the promise of the anointing of the Spirit as prophesied in Isaiah and the means whereby he could undertake his ministry. Obviously this event reveals that Jesus saw the coming of the Spirit on him at the Jordan as an anointing.

The second word associated with this coming of the Spirit is one which occurs in John's gospel and is the word "baptise" (Jn 1:33). John the Baptist had a direct revelation from God that the one on whom he saw the Spirit descend would "baptise with the Holy Spirit". It seems only too evident that there is an implication here that this giving of the Spirit to others by Jesus, described as a "baptising in the spirit", had a close affinity to the way he was receiving the Spirit himself. It would not be out of place to say that he was "baptised in the Spirit" at the Jordan.

The context of this coming of the Spirit, this anointing or baptism is quite clearly the context of the start of Jesus' active ministry. The context must be allowed to determine the nature of the coming of the Spirit on Jesus as something necessary for his ministry. It is Luke who picks up the expression "baptise in the Spirit" in the opening chapter of Acts and applies it to a similar context, one in which the disciples receive "power" (enabling) for the purpose of witnessing or ministry. Such a usage in Acts fits perfectly with the usage when Jesus received the Spirit at the Jordan. It was through the baptism or anointing that Jesus was enabled to minister. He did not engage in active ministry before this time, but he certainly did afterwards, and what we witness here is the Spirit of God coming on Jesus for the purpose of adding a new dimension to his life - the work of ministry. The Spirit had not rested on him like this before.

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to preach....."**

The preaching and the mighty works of Jesus were the obvious outcome of this anointing, but it is important to see that it involved something much deeper than powerful works of service and expressions of gifts from the Spirit, crucial though they were. This deeper aspect is primarily indicated by the symbolism of the dove which came to rest on him. We need to recognise that such a visionary symbol was of great importance in communicating the nature of the Spirit that came to rest on Jesus. His was to be a ministry which was to bear the marks of gentleness, graciousness and compassion. The coming of the dove pointed to the heart attitude that was to underlie all the mighty works. Compassion was to be their starting point. The love and mercy and grace of his Father were now to fill the human frame of Jesus in full measure through the Spirit. They were to be the river in which the gifts of power were to flow and operate. When he saw the poor, the needy, the widow woman, the sick, the demonised, the outcast and the oppressed then compassion and pity would flow from him initiating again and again healing and comfort. In his own heart as Son of God he would find an immense inner response to these powerful gracious urgings of the Spirit.

In the light of this we need to recognise that true anointings, true baptisms of the Spirit are as much an impress on the heart as they are on the actions of those who receive them. They can be equally described as a baptism of love as well as a baptism of powerful works. The expression "full of the Spirit" which Luke uses in such contexts is an apt description. Any analysis of Jesus as man of the Spirit without taking this Jordan episode into consideration would be incomplete.

Jesus, then, was born of the Spirit and anointed with the Spirit. In every department of his life the Spirit had sway. That needs also to be our experience. It is a call to be constantly open to the Spirit, doing all we can to "go on being filled with the Spirit" seeking his fellowship in praise and worship of Jesus and the Father, watching lest we should grieve or quench him with unrighteous attitudes and behaviour. He is the source of our spiritual life, our link to Jesus and the Father, the other "Comforter" that Jesus has so graciously given to us. His presence is our first foundation.